SLIDE #1
Title Slide

LOOKING FOR CHINA: AMERICAN IMAGES

(PART I)

Produced by the China Council of the Asia Society

SLIDE #2
U.S.-China Maze

This is a journey to China, one that has been taken by many Americans, including many who have never been there. It's not a travelogue, but a journey of the mind -- a look at some of the popular images that Americans have had about China. Over the years, these images have run the gamut from love to hate, from fascination to fear. Many have been contradictory. It has often been like a journey through a maze, full of dead ends and optical illusions.

SLIDE #3
Digging a hole to China

As children, we were told that if you dig a hole deep enough, you'd come out in China. Americans have imagined China as a mysterious, remote and exotic land.

SLIDE #4
Marching Chinese

From our earliest encounters, Americans have been fascinated by the sheer numbers of Chinese. "Believe it or not," said Ripley, "if all the Chinese in the world were to march four abreast past a given point, they would never finish passing though they marched forever and ever."

SLIDE #5
"Yellow Peril"
(cartoon)

Often, that seemed threatening. During the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion of 1900, journalists in America popularized the idea of the "yellow peril." It fixed the notion in many American minds that Chinese came in hordes and were something to be feared.

SLIDE #6
Example of
Chinese art

A contrasting image was China's great cultural tradition. We were impressed with the magnificent bronzes, the porcelains, and the paintings of the world's oldest continuous civilization.

SLIDE #7
Example of
Chinese art

In this view, China was a land of great beauty and order. But as a result of this stereotype, we sometimes imagined that all Chinese people possessed great patience, wisdom and knowledge.

SLIDE #8
Chinese businessmen
(photo)

When Americans actually went to China, different people discovered very different Chinas. Nineteenth century businessmen saw the Chinese as potential consumers of their products. For most of them, the promise of a boundless "China market" proved to be a myth.

SLIDE #9
Western
Missionaries

Western missionaries saw the Chinese as potential converts to Christianity. But instead of a lofty and wise civilization, they wrote home about a poor, backward, superstitious nation of heathens.

SLIDE #10
The Good Earth

The missionaries' image was reinforced in books and movies. Pearl Buck's The Good Earth was an attempt to understand the lives of individuals, to give "faces to the faceless Chinese." But while it stirred American sympathies, this portrayal also helped to characterize the Chinese as a childlike people in need of Western help.

Some of these images contained elements of truth about China, but they contained untruths as well -- and from a distance it was hard to tell the difference.

SLIDE #11
Fu Manchu

In trying to understand the Chinese, Americans have frequently confused reality with fantasy. Our views -- both positive and negative -- were material ripe for the pulp novels earlier in this century and for the imagination mills of Hollywood. Fu Manchu -- a mad genius, skilled in the arts of evil. He appealed to our thirst for the exotic.

SLIDE #12
"Dragon Lady"

You may be familiar with this image of the mysterious, sinister, and sensual Chinese woman -- the "dragon lady." She has had a long life.

SLIDE #13
Charlie Chan

Charlie Chan appealed to a more benevolent view of the Chinese. Like Fu Manchu, he was smart and clever. Unlike Fu Manchu, he didn't commit crimes; he solved them. Even so, he spoke English as though he had discovered it in a fortune cookie. Yet, in 25 years and in 48 films he was never portrayed by a Chinese actor.

SLIDE #14
Bruce Lee --
Kung Fu

Another more positive picture is the Chinese as hero of the martial arts. Here, for instance, is Bruce Lee, who captured the imagination of American youth during the 1960s in a series of Kung Fu movies.

SLIDE #15
Jefferson Starship
cover

Over the years, these images have developed lives of their own, appearing and reappearing in different forms. Unfortunately, they tell us very little about the reality of China or of the Chinese. But they <u>do</u> say a great deal about how little we know China, and about how we use China to propel flights of fancy.

SLIDE #16
Public opinion
chart

Public opinion polls have reflected our ambivalence -- and our confusion -- about the Chinese. According to a Gallup poll taken in 1966, the Chinese were seen as hard working, but ignorant, warlike, sly and treacherous. By 1972, when U.S. relations with China improved, the highest ranking adjectives in the same poll were hard working, intelligent, progressive, artistic, practical, and honest. in the space of six years, Americans had replaced very negative opinions about the Chinese with very positive opinions.

SLIDE #17
Chinese working
on a railroad

The roller coaster history of American attitudes toward China started in the mid-1800s, when sizable numbers of Chinese came here to help build the West, in railroad and mining camps. Before long, many Americans wanted them to leave because Chinese were competing for jobs.

SLIDE #18
"Chinese must go"
(cartoon)

In the 1870s it was called "The Chinese Question." The answer in this newspaper cartoon of the day was clear. The result was the Exclusion Act of 1882 which prohibited Chinese from entering this country.

SLIDE #19
Opium Den
(cartoon)

The Chinese often lived apart in Chinatowns, and ignorance of their different customs, fear, and racism influenced our opinions. We imagined them in crowded dens, smoking opium, and eating rats.

SLIDE #20
Battle Brady

Cultural conflict has been one source of American images of China. Another has been war. From the Boxer Rebellion to wars in Korea and Vietnam (when the Chinese were our enemies), and during World War II (when China was our ally), our views have been shaped and conditioned by conflicts in Asia.

SLIDE #21
World War II
Allies

During World War II, Chinese and Americans became partners in the war against Japan. In the early 1940s, the United States stood shoulder to shoulder with China, England and the Soviet Union. Our vision of China was romantic and heroic.

SLIDE #22
United China
Relief Poster

Americans were moved by the war-time suffering of China and responded warmly to the image of Chinese in need of our help and support.

SLIDE #23
Lincoln and Sun
(postage stamp)

We could identify with the Chinese because, we believed, the Chinese identified with us. Here, Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles were equated with Abraham Lincoln's principles of democracy. Out of this association grew the persistent notion that Chinese and Americans shared the same values.

SLIDE #24
Graham Peck
(cartoon)

As thousands of Americans and Chinese came into direct contact in war-time China, many old stereotypes were dispelled only to be replaced by new misperceptions. In this cartoon, an American observor saw humor in the situation, but there was also disillusion and disappointment, on both sides. Almost no one had been prepared for the experience.

SLIDE #25
"Banzai!"

During the Korean War, the worst of our fears were realized when China entered the conflict in June 1950, and for the first time, Chinese and Americans fought each other in a major war. Sometimes we got our oriental villains confused: here, Chinese soldiers are screaming the Japanese war-cry, "Banzai!"

SLIDE #26
Collier's
cover with
Boxers

Sometimes it seemed like the "yellow peril" all over again. This November 1950 cover of Collier's magazine recalled the days of a half-century earlier, when Americans and other foreign troops marched on Peking to rescue their countrymen under siege in the Chinese capital.

SLIDE #27
Chiang and Mdm.
Chiang on Time
(1938)

American images of Chinese leaders have also been subject to great swings and shifts. During the 1930s and '40s China was personified by Madame and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. We believed that they shared our vision of a Christian and democratic China -- Madame Chiang was, after all, a graduate of Wellesley College -- and 1938 found them as Time magazine's "man and wife" of the year.

SLIDE #28
Chiang Kai-shek
on a white horse

Chiang was seen as a noble hero on a white horse, leading 400 million Chinese to freedom. It was a comfortable and reassuring thought, and it was largely false. Then, when Chiang's Nationalists were defeated by the Chinese Communists in 1949, images of the Chinese leader took another turn.

SLIDE #29
Mao with peasants
(Time)

No white horse, no family portraits, no serene poses. As China's politics changed, perceptions changed to suit what appeared to be the new reality. Mao Tse-tung was not just Chinese, he was a Red Chinese. In China, millions of people held high hopes for the new Communist rulers, but we saw only a tyrant. As with Chiang Kai-shek, the result was a new stereotype, part fact and part fiction.

SLIDE #30
China at Gunpoint

Without diplomatic relations after 1949, China was closed to Americans. For the most part, we were left only with opinions, misinformation, and our imaginations. Some Americans felt we had somehow "lost" China. We felt betrayed because China had not conformed to our expectations. China again seemed a fearful and inscrutable place.

SLIDE #31
Boat with bomb
(Time)

In many minds, the "yellow peril" had merged with the "red peril" -- millions of Chinese jammed into an old-fashioned dragon boat that carried an atomic bomb. Strong fears of China were both reflected and shaped by popular images like this one.

SLIDE #32
Mass rally

In the 1960s, the mass political rallies and Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution ressurected the image of fanatical hordes, united against their own past as well as the imperialist West.

SLIDE #33
Mao is up-down
(cartoon)

Some of these images contained a certain measure of truth, but we had a hard time understanding the turmoil and political changes that dominated Chinese life in the 1960s and early '70s - a confusion no doubt shared by many Chinese.

SLIDE #34
China/Vietnam War
(cartoon)

The Vietnam War seemed only to confirm negative views of China as a hostile power. Only later would Americans realize the age-old antagonisms that existed between Vietnam and China.

SLIDE #35
Ping-pong players
(Time)

Then, in 1971, before we really knew or understood what was happening, the first Americans to show up in China for more than twenty years were not soldiers, but ping-pong players.

SLIDE #36
Mao with ping-pong paddle (cartoon)

Americans woke up one morning to find the Red Boss, now Chairman Mao, leaping the Great Wall, armed only with a ping-pong paddle, ready for a new game with the United States. The Chinese called for "Friendship First, Competition Second."

SLIDE #37
Nixon and Kissinger (cartoon)

As the emotional pendulum swung, positive images reappeared, including this "new version of Charlie Chan and his number one son": Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, opening the door to China that had been shut for a generation. Some remembered that caught in the middle of the handshake between Nixon and Mao . . . was Chiang Kai-shek.

SLIDE #38
Nixon-Mao hand-shake (cartoon)

He and his heirs occupied Taiwan and that island remained the basic issue dividing China and America, until the two countries normalized relations in January 1979. America's ties to Taiwan made normalization a politically sensitive issue. But most of our images of China were positive, even euphoric, during the 1970s.

SLIDE #39
American visitors
(photo)

As Americans discovered "New China" they were startled by contrasts with the old China: no longer was China a land of flood, famine, and disease. This was true enough, but gave to new stereotypes about the Chinese revolution:

SLIDE #40
Chinese poster

China as a successful social experiment, a model society that seemed to be without crime, prostitution, inflation, and unemployment. Some even said there were no flies in China. But like so many previous views, this too proved one-dimensional, in part because we saw only what we wanted to see and also because we were limited by what the Chinese permitted us to see.

SLIDE #41
Modernization
poster

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, China's new leaders announced plans to modernize their economy by the year 2000. A new pragmatism replaced the old revolutionary ideology, and the image of China was altered once more.

SLIDE #42
Deng Xiaoping
(Time)

China looked West and in early 1979, the new era of normalization was marked by Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping's barnstorming tour of America. Deng almost seemed like an American politician, touring automobile plants and airplane factories, eating barbecued spareribs, and wearing a ten-gallon hat. He even made the cover of Time magazine as "man of the year."

SLIDE #43
Opium perfume ad

This latest turn of events left many Americans with a touch of "China fever." This 1979 ad for "Opium" perfume was protested by Chinese-American organizations. They objected to glamorizing a drug which had brought so much suffering to China in the past.

SLIDE #44
American ads in streets of Peking
(cartoon)

But China's interest in purchasing Western technology was welcome news to American businessmen. The myth of the China market - now with a potential of one billion people - was quickly resurrected as American salesmen flocked to Peking.

SLIDE #45
Western movie posters in Canton

These western movie posters are in the city of Canton. We found a China more open to Western ideas: Chinese studying English and anxious to see the United States. We were flattered and receptive. It was tempting to think once again, that the Chinese wanted to be just like us.

SLIDE #46
Democracy Wall

At the same time, China showed a more liberal face to the world, a tolerance for dissent -- "democracy wall" in Peking. Some Americans dared to think that China would embrace Western notions of law and democracy. In late 1979, even the illusion was removed when Chinese authorities scraped the wall clean and moved it to a remote part of town.

SLIDE #47
Chinese landscape (photo)

Illusions persist. Stereotypes fade slowly. Yet our partial picture of China is gradually being widened. And with renewed contact and a more equal relationship, there is hope of seeing the Chinese as they see themselves: as people living in a different culture and society, though sharing certain universal hopes and aspirations.

SLIDE #48
"One Hell of a
Pothole" cartoon

We're also reminded that stereotypes can be laughable and can go both ways.

SLIDE #49
U.S. - China maze

More than once, the kaleidoscope of images has obscured and distorted America's vision of China. China and our relations with China have changed so much, so often it's little wonder that we have been confused. But we have learned that there is no simple, one-dimensional picture of China; and we are exploring different ways to get there from here.